



Special Remarks by
Michael H. Trujillo, M.D., M.P.H., M.S.
At a Memorial Service Celebrating the Life of Luana L. Reyes
Thursday, November 8, 2001

Luana L. Reyes
February 20, 1933 – November 5, 2001

It is a great honor to say a few words about Luana – a friend, a peer, and a family member of the Indian Health Service team.

It was only seven weeks ago that I stood at this same place to say a few words for Sharon's mother and Chris' grandmother. Luana was here too, sitting there where you are. Now, this morning, we gather here once again. This time to honor Luana Reyes. This is a sure reminder that the length of our lives, our time in this world, is uncertain. But as Chief Seattle said: "There is no death, only a change of worlds."

Now, Luana is passing into another world. Her journey is beginning. Her body returns to Mother Earth and her Spirit goes to join her ancestors and her family with the Great Spirit.

I had a chance to visit and talk with Luana several times during her hospitalization. Even up to last Wednesday, she always asked about people and how things were going. She always said to thank everyone for their thoughts and prayers and their tireless efforts to do good. She thanked her staff for making her Presidential Award possible as it was their efforts that made the program successful.

I could speak a very long time about Luana's accomplishments and awards. I could tell many stories about her, but there are others to do that. Yet, I do want to say that there is a void in me. There is an emptiness now without Luana's presence. Her chair in our Office of the Director Conference Room is empty. Her office remains open, but she is not at her desk. I don't hear her voice any more.

I wonder how I am to handle this along with everything else that has happened, and as new developments unfold. What do I hold on to? What do I steady myself with? How? I have questions that are unanswered and, probably, some inner anger. Now, I have to move from that uncertainty to acceptance. And, I must look down the road and go forward as Luana would want me to – as she would want us all to do.

That void, that emptiness will now begin to fill and be nourished by memories. We laughed together. We joked. We teased. We discussed issues at length. We tested each others' ideas and opinions. We challenged each other. We grew together – as friends, as peers. We envisioned things as they could be and possible ways to get there. We helped each other. We listened to and respected each other. We molded together as a team – a family.

Luana was the glue that held the inside and the outside together. She was the one who was always there. She always did her best to make the bureaucracy work. She stood for honesty and integrity. She gave the Agency a good name for critical administrative and managerial functions. She made the invisible – visible. For those in the field, she was also their glue – and, their touchstone for making things work – for retaining hope in the importance of the every day aspects of working in the field. She was steadfast – in keeping us legal and the Agency solvent. She was a mentor.

She was truly a leader – an Indian leader. I am honored to have known her, to have learned from her, and to have worked side-by-side with her.

Oh Great Spirit – watch out! Here comes a tiger!!!

Now on the Eve of the Sacred Fourth Day of Luana's passing, she truly begins her journey home. She will find her way, wrapped in her blanket and carrying the sweet grass and the sage.

Someday, you and I will also being that journey to be with our Grandfathers, our Grandmothers, our Fathers, our Mothers, our Family.

We all carry a part of one another as we pass through this Circle of Life. I now carry a part of Luana with me, as you do too. We carry the Luana who was kind, was giving, was caring, was strong and loving. She has passed that on to all of us and to her daughter, Kecia.

Until our own journey begins, let us be kind, be caring, be respectful, be understanding and loving to all – as we are all family – we are all related.

In closing –

May beauty always surround you. May beauty always surround Kecia. May beauty always surround Luana's family. May you all walk in beauty. May you always walk in beauty.